

NR Eligible: yes X  
no       

Description of Property and Justification: *(Please attach map and photo)*

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

**MHT Comments:**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

many theaters. Lust was one of the local theater chain owners who joined and extended the trend of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne neighborhood cinemas. The Cheverly Theater, now known as the Publick Playhouse, maintains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a unique example of a mid-century Streamline Moderne theater located in Prince George's County, and continues to function in its original context.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Designed by John Eberson, one of the foremost American theater architects, the Cheverly Theater is a large, Streamline Moderne-designed building located in Bladensburg, Maryland. Constructed in 1947, the building is defined by its rounded walls, vertical brickwork, and curvilinear metal marquee, all characteristics of the Streamline Moderne. The Streamline Moderne, also known as Moderne, Streamline Deco or Art Moderne, was a stylized architectural expression that drew attention to the "modern values of movement." [25] Far less opulent and more restrained than Art Deco of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Streamline Moderne was an economic and stylistic response to the devastating effects of the Great Depression (1929-1941), when building materials were scarce and owners were reluctant to spend money on mere applied ornamentation, which was the hallmark of Art Deco. The Cheverly Theater is a late example, albeit stylized, of the Streamline Moderne.

The Cheverly Theater is set on a solid parged foundation and has a brick structure of six-course, American-bond brick. A corbeled brick cornice highlights the flat roof, which is finished by a concrete band. The central bay of the façade (north elevation), also curved, extends above the main block. Three wide vertical panels, each composed of nine vertical courses of sawtooth brick corbelling, highlight the central bay leading up to the large lighted metal signs reading "PUBLICK PLAYHOUSE." Centrally located on the façade, the marquee is clad in metal sheeting with rounded corners of crimped metal. Sheltered by the marquee are two sets of double-leaf, metal-frame glass doors flanked by ten-light fixed sash, which mimic additional door openings. Each opening is set in a wide, fluted metal surround indicative of the Streamline Moderne. Decorative ceramic tiling extends across the door opening while a frieze, set in a half-round surround, rests above. Flanking the central door opening are four display windows with plain wood surrounds integrated into the structure of the theater. These display openings are smaller than the originals, which is evidenced by a rowlock brick surround above and corroborated by historic photographs. At the curved outer corners are two-part strip windows of glass brick with concrete lug sills. Metal security grates have been applied to the openings.

Serving a functional use, the secondary elevations of the theater lack ornamentation, which is typical for this building type. The brick utilized in the construction of these elevations is lighter in color, which serves to accent the curvilinear, Streamline Moderne façade. The east and west (side) elevations are punctuated by brick buttresses with concrete caps. Fenestration of the east elevation is limited to three, single-leaf flush metal doors and a large louvered vent. The west elevation has a single-leaf, flush metal door flanked by multi-light glass block openings with concrete lug sills.

The rear of the theater is defined by its four canted corners, none of which are the same width. Devoid of openings, the rear elevation is punctuated by its large, exterior smoke stack. Constructed of brick, the stack terminates well above the roofline. The southwestern canted bay has a one-story, three-sided appendage original to the structure. Constructed of six-course, American-bond brick, the appendage has a flat roof covered with tar. A single-leaf, flush metal door provides access to the interior of the theater via brick steps with metal railing. A wide window opening has been enclosed with bricks.

Shortly after the theater was purchased by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in 1975, a small addition was added to the rear of the building. This one-story addition has an L-shaped form. Set on a solid foundation of concrete block, this structure is clad in vinyl siding. The cross-gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and finished with narrow overhanging eaves. Due to the slope of the lot, the addition had to be constructed on a raised foundation, so as to facilitate movement to and

### MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended \_\_\_\_\_

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from the rear of the theater. This configuration requires the use of two exterior metal stairs to access the single-leaf, flush metal doors. Window openings hold vinyl sash in either single-light awning configuration or 1/1, double hung sash. A double-leaf, flush metal door is located on the eastern side of the addition and provides access to the crawl space of the addition.

#### Interior Description

The interior of the building was not surveyed as part of this report. Based on written information, the Cheverly was an atmospheric theater. The following is taken from the Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form completed in 1993:

"The interior of the main block consists of three basic spaces: box office area, lobby and auditorium. The box office area is just inside the exterior double doors. This area in turn leads into a curved lobby area and then through doors into the large sloping auditorium. In the auditorium, the walls are paneled with small green acoustical panels in geometric pattern. Drapes hang in parallel rows from each side of the auditorium. All decoration is in green and beige and salmon colors. Doors are beige with green panels, and the surrounds are painted salmon pink. In the original 1947 theater there was a low balustrade behind the last row of seats; it has been replaced by a full wall." [26]

In his book, Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, D.C., Robert K. Headley describes the interior as it looked on opening night:

The floor of the lobby was done in blue and henna tiles. The walls were finished in reddish gold marble. The original interior decoration included walls covered in damask of gold, henna, and green with carpeting in the same colors. Flanking the proscenium arch were floral black light murals painted by New York artist E. G. Battisti. The seats were covered in mohair with coral backs and robin's egg blue cushions. [27]

#### Shed

The one-story, one-bay prefabricated shed is located behind a metal security fence. Based on its form and materials, it appears that this shed was constructed circa 2000. The wood-frame structure is clad in T-111 siding and has a side-gable roof of asphalt shingles. Narrow overhanging eaves complete the roofline. The façade (southwest elevation) has a single-leaf, flush wood door set in a narrow, square-edge wood surround. Secondary elevations have no openings.

#### HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Cheverly Theater was constructed west of the community of Cheverly, for which it is named. Robert Marshall, president of the Washington Suburban Realty Company, platted seven sections of Cheverly between 1918 and 1926. Taking advantage of the natural topography, Marshall designed the community to take advantage of the curving, hilly landscape. He named his new neighborhood after Cheverly Gardens, an adjoining 43-acre subdivision he acquired in 1918 near Landover Station. [1]

Marshall marketed Cheverly as a "modern" subdivision with many conveniences, including "paving, electricity, high-pressure water main, schools, &c. [sic]." [2] The subdivision was quickly improved and, in October 1920, the first street, now called Cheverly Avenue, was paved. To spur development, between 1921 and 1925, Marshall constructed 34 kit houses, the majority of which were designed by Sears, Roebuck and Company and McClure Homes Company. [3] By 1923, all roads in Cheverly were surfaced and street lamps were installed. That same year, the first school for the neighborhood was constructed. By 1924, more than 25 houses were built in the neighborhood and more than 350 lots had been sold. Houses ranged in price from \$5,000 to more than \$15,000. [4] The majority of lots in Cheverly were improved by individual owners, however, several were improved by speculative builders. S.A. Melius of Hyattsville was one of several builders who purchased lots in Cheverly for development. [5]

#### MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended \_\_\_\_\_ Eligibility not recommended \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria: \_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D Considerations: \_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D \_\_\_ E \_\_\_ F \_\_\_ G

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In 1927, after a failed attempt to redevelop Forest Road into a grand avenue leading to the Beaver Dam Country Club (now the Prince George's Country Club), Marshall lost control of the Washington Suburban Realty Company and was replaced by Edwin Dutton.[6] In 1929, Harry Wardman purchased the rights to develop Cheverly at a cost of two million dollars.[7] However, the noted builder and developer was overextended and because of the Great Depression, Wardman was soon bankrupt. Because of the short time Wardman owned the development and the economic constraints he faced, it is not known if Wardman was responsible for any improvements in Cheverly. In May 1931, a public auction of 334 lots was held "to satisfy foreclosure" of the Cheverly Corporation.[8] That same year, the Town of Cheverly was incorporated.[9]

The loss of prestige that resulted from the public auction combined with the economic constraints of the 1930s slowed the development of the Town. It was not until after World War II (1941-1945) that construction activity began to increase. Several new churches were built and the Town acquired the ten-acre Town Park.

Spurred by a marked increase in commercial properties alongside Annapolis and Landover roads in Bladensburg, in February 1945, the Cheverly Theater Company purchased multiple vacant parcels on the south side of Landover Road south of its intersection with Annapolis Road.[10] This location became a prime candidate in the mid-twentieth century due to the development of a commercial corridor at the eastern end of Bladensburg targeted at the motoring public. The development of the surrounding residential neighborhoods served as the catalyst for the construction of the Cheverly Theater. Led by the president of the company, Julian A. Brylowski, the Cheverly opened on February 6, 1947 to high acclaim, with many local notables in attendance. An article in The Washington Post read, "While within the theater every new idea looking to comfortable enjoyment has been utilized, similar provision has been made for easy parking on a large lot adjoining the new house." [11] The theater was managed by Sidney Lust, an area theatre magnate who was known for his showmanship as well as his benevolence in the communities in which he operated. The opening ceremony at the Cheverly Theater featured the National Anthem sung by Gene Archer, addresses by local political leaders including T. Howard Duckett, and Landale Sasscer, a Bugs Bunny cartoon, a Pete Smith Specialty, and the feature presentation was Red Skelton in The Show Off.

For many years, the Cheverly Theater was a neighborhood institution, one of the finest of the Sidney Lust chain of movie houses, of which there were more than ten. Residents of Cheverly and Bladensburg flocked to see first-run films in the Cheverly Theater, its interior distinguished by Art Deco-inspired designs, with ornate sky scenes in the ceiling, plush seating, and even air conditioning.[12] Eberson designed atmospheric theaters throughout the world, including New York City, Sydney, Australia, and Caracas, Venezuela.

On January 10, 1951, the Cheverly Theater Company conveyed the property to John L. Berlin.[13] Berlin, born in 1896, was an immigrant from Lithuania. His wife, Esther, was originally from Russia. The couple had two sons, Joseph and Donald. John Berlin was a plumber in the Washington, D.C. area. Of note, at the time of the 1930 U.S. Federal Census, his real property was assessed as \$13,000, which was much higher than most of his neighbors.[14] Notably, this was an extraordinary amount for a plumbing contractor living in Riverdale, Maryland.

By the late 1960s, the theater was no longer in steady use, sometimes showing adult films. On January 2, 1970, a fire heavily damaged the interior of the building. A result of an electrical failure in a candy machine, the fire spread throughout the theater, causing about \$30,000 in damage.[15] The next year the theater was conveyed by Berlin to the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington. It is not known in what capacity the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington utilized the theater. This organization sold the property in 1973 to a group of investors incorporated as Rental Associates.[16] Standing vacant and damaged by fire, the theater was acquired in 1975 by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.[17] At this time, renovations were undertaken to convert the building into a place for live theater performances." [18] Volunteers, known as the Friends of the Publick

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Playhouse, provided much of the initial work that allowed the project to succeed. Thirty years later, the theater reopened to the public with its new name, the Publick Playhouse. A three-day festival with performances by local theatrical groups was observed by local dignitaries and a crowded house. The first year of operation for the Publick Playhouse was a resounding success. Doug Herbert, managing director, stated, "A lot of people in the political arena and in the arts community were dubious if this place could be booked every weekend. There was a lot of question about whether groups would leave their communities and come here to showcase. I think just by looking at the schedule, we've proved it could be done." [19]

Further alterations to the structure were undertaken in the mid-1980s. "The original colorful exterior décor was retained until the renovations of 1984. At this time, the scallop decoration was painted over; the exterior box office was closed, and the box office window bricked in. These exterior modifications did not alter the overriding form of the building. The character-defining elements such as its rounded corners, vertical brick panels, and original marquee remain intact. In response to community involvement, on the interior many of the lowest rows of seats in the auditorium were removed in order to make room for a large stage. As the building was a movie theater, it had no stage. The design characteristics of the theater lent itself well to the introduction of a stage without compromising its sense of time and place. Additionally, the low balustrade behind the last row of seats was replaced by a full wall, creating a complete separation between auditorium and lobby." [20] The alteration of the building's paint scheme did not alter the building's exterior structurally.

The Publick Playhouse currently operates a full schedule of various performance types. Still owned by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, the theater serves as a popular venue for music and modern dance, musical theater, historical drama, educational programs and monthly events for seniors. [21]

#### ARCHITECT - JOHN EBERSON

John Eberson, born 1875 in Romania, studied at the University of Vienna. Following graduation, Eberson served in the military where he was incarcerated following a disagreement with a superior officer. After escaping from prison, he fled to the United States and settled in St. Louis, Missouri. "His earliest atmospheric experiments are found in his stage design and painting work between 1901-1903 for the Johnston Realty and Construction Company. Eberson's earliest known conventional theater commission was for the Jewel in Hamilton, Ohio (1909). After moving to Chicago in 1910 he began to receive steady theater design work. While his early commissions could be characterized as traditional, by the mid-1910's Eberson had clearly forged a new direction with the Austin Majestic (1916) and Dallas Majestic theaters (1917). His first truly Atmospheric Theater, the Houston Majestic, opened in 1923. The Atmospheric Theaters reflected Eberson's European heritage, especially Italian influences in statuary and interior motifs." [22] Though Eberson's firm designed thirteen theaters in the greater Washington area, only three - the Bethesda, the Silver, and the Cheverly - survive. [23]

#### OPERATOR - SIDNEY LUST

Sidney Lust, an area theatre magnate was known for his showmanship as well as his benevolence in the communities in which he operated. Lust was "one of the local theater chain owners who joined and extended the trend of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne neighborhood cinemas. A native of New York City, he began his career as a road-show stage carpenter and then managed big-time vaudeville acts. Lust was a partner with Warner Bros., opening their local film exchange when he came to Washington in 1914. A year later he went into business for himself, buying, distributing and selling motion picture films for independent producers in the Washington metropolitan area. He leased his first theater in the early 1920s on Ninth Street, N.W., and then branched out into suburban Maryland." [24] Rather than just entertain his customers at his theaters, Lust transformed the buildings into civic centers devoted to the betterment of the communities he served. The annual Easter Egg hunt in Hyattsville, Maryland, would attract more than 15,000 kids, lured by the prospect of 3,000 eggs filled with money. Lust, ever the entertainer, orchestrated talent contests, pie-

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ating contests, races and other field events in conjunction with the egg hunt. Local clubs, such as the American Legion and Kiwanis Club often paired with Lust to enhance his many events. At Christmas each year his movie halls served as collection points for toys and food for the poor. Children and adults were admitted to movies for free by bringing a new toy or canned food, which was turned over to the needy families of the county. During World War II, his theaters were utilized for bond drives and March of Dimes polio fund appeals. At the time of his death in 1955, the pioneer Washington theater owner, philanthropist, and civic leader owned a chain of ten indoor and drive-in theaters.

#### LOCATIONAL INFORMATION

Located on the south side of Landover Road at its convergence with Annapolis Road, the Cheverly Theater fronts the wide concrete sidewalk lining the street. Sloped slightly to the east and south, the lot features a sprawling asphalt parking lot in the rear accessed via 55th Avenue as well as an alleyway west of the theater. East of the theater, between the building and the concrete sidewalk, the lot is landscaped with mature trees and foundation plantings. A chain-link security fence lines the southern and western bounds of the property. Additional parking is located across 55th Avenue in a paved lot.

The Cheverly Theater is associated with 1.243 acres.

#### DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

The Cheverly Theater, located at 5445 Landover Road, was constructed in 1947 in response to the expansion of suburban communities in northern Prince George's County. The Cheverly Theater is eligible under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation, providing a venue where residents living in the surrounding residential neighborhoods could socialize and find entertainment. The Cheverly Theater is not eligible under Criterion B because it is not associated with the lives of persons significant to our past. The theater is eligible under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. This Streamline Moderne-style building is an illustration of an architectural style infrequently found in Prince George's County, especially in the post-World War II period. As a product of this post-war era, it demonstrates common construction techniques of the mid-twentieth century in the United States. Moreover, the building was designed by renowned theater architect John Eberson. Eberson designed thirteen theaters in the Washington, D.C. area, of which only three are extant. The Silver (1938) and the Bethesda (1938) Theaters, both located in Montgomery County, Maryland, are better representatives of Eberson's earlier work in the Streamline Moderne. However, the Cheverly Theater, one of the architect's later examples of the style, is the only extant example of Eberson's work in Prince George's County. It retains sufficient integrity to reflect his prolific architectural skills as the designer of a theater and master of the Streamline Moderne style. The Cheverly Theater was not evaluated under Criterion D. Therefore, it is recommended that the building at 5445 Landover Road is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C.

#### ASSESSMENT OF PHYSICAL INTEGRITY:

The Cheverly Theater's integrity of design, materials, and workmanship remain sufficiently intact. Minor renovations reflect a slightly altered function required in the transformation of the building from a first-run movie theater to a venue for both live and film productions. The building retains its original form, albeit augmented by a small addition on the rear that is not visible from Landover Road. Its iconic marquee is intact and functional. Although the in-kind sign centered on the façade of the building is not original, it pays homage to the design of the original Cheverly Theater sign in material, massing, and design. Enclosure of the box office ticket window has affected the building's integrity. Unlike many theater ticket windows, however, especially those on high-style buildings, the ticket window of the Cheverly Theater was a minor feature that did not draw attention by its architectural design. Rather, it was flush with the plane of the exterior wall and non-descript. Located just outside the main entry, the ticket

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Window has been enclosed with brick, leaving no trace of its prior existence other than ghosting. Although the entry doors are replacements, which is typical for commercial buildings, the fenestration pattern created by this bank of doors remains intact, displaying such original elements as the fluted surround and entry bays. The fire in 1970 did little to compromise the exterior of the building.

Located at the convergence of Landover Road and Annapolis Road, the placement of the Cheverly Theater reflects growth of the automobile and the burgeoning suburbs of Washington, D.C. Advantageously sited to attract patrons at this busy intersection, the Cheverly Theater continues to be a visual local landmark. As such, the Cheverly Theater retains integrity of location, setting, and feeling. The theater has continued to provide performing arts for the community in which it was erected, and thus has integrity of association.

Overall, the Cheverly Theater maintains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a John Eberson-designed theater constructed in 1947 for the residents of Cheverly in Prince George's County.

1. Raymond W. Bellamy, Jr., "The Town of Cheverly, Maryland: Plantation to Planned Community," written for Cheverly Day, May 11, 1996, 4.
2. Robert Marshall, "Cheverly Addition Rapidly Develops; Many Homes Built," The Washington Post, 28 April 1924.
3. Bellamy, "The Town of Cheverly, Maryland," 14.
4. Robert Marshall, "Cheverly Addition Rapidly Develops; Many Homes Built," The Washington Post, 28 April 1924.
5. "S.A. Melius Acquires Several Cheverly Lots," The Washington Post, 3 July 1927.
6. Bellamy, "The Town of Cheverly," 6.
7. "Cheverly Has New Finance Plan," The Washington Post, 15 September 1929.
8. "Public Auction," The Washington Post, 2 May 1931.
9. Barbara Vobejda, "Where We Live: Cheverly Retains Aura of Oasis Amid Bustle," The Washington Post, 7 June 1986.
10. Cheverly Theater Company, Inc., Prince George's County Plat Records, Book 10/Plat 18.
11. Nelson B. Bell, About the Showshops. 1947. The Washington Post (1923-1954), Feb 04, 1947.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/151973590?accountid=34227> (accessed September 27, 2011).
12. Susan G. Pearl, "Publick Playhouse," (PG: 69-28) Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form (1993), 8:1.
13. Cheverly Theater Company to John L. Berlin, Prince George's County Land Records, 1415:383.
14. 1930 U.S. Federal Census, Riverdale, Prince George's, Maryland, Series 878, Page 3A, Enumeration District 51, Image 698.0, John L. Berlin.
15. Theater in Cheverly Heavily Damaged. 1970. The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973), January 4, 1970.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/147753135?accountid=34227> (accessed September 27, 2011).
16. Hebrew Home of Greater Washington to Jerome Golub, Raymond Lassen, Rose Schlein Weinsoff and Rental Associates, Inc., Prince George's County Land Records WWW 4312:446.
17. Jerome Golub, Raymond Lassen, and Rose Schelin Weinsoff to The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's County Land Records, 4560:3.
18. Pearl, "Publick Playhouse," (PG: 69-28), 8:2.
19. Publick Playhouse to Being Second Year. 1978. The Washington Post (1974-Current file), Jan 26, 1978.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/147012984?accountid=34227> (accessed September 28, 2011).
20. Pearl, "Publick Playhouse," (PG: 69-28), 8:2.
21. Publick Playhouse, "About Publick Playhouse," Prince George's County Department of Park and Recreation,  
[http://arts.pgprarks.com/Our\\_Facilities/Publick\\_Playhouse/About\\_Publick\\_Playhouse.htm](http://arts.pgprarks.com/Our_Facilities/Publick_Playhouse/About_Publick_Playhouse.htm) (accessed September 27, 2011).
22. <http://www.design.upenn.edu/archives/majorcollections/eberson.html>
23. <http://www.adsw.org/site/MD/Bethesda/WisconsinAve/7719/pressRelease1.html>

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24. Bethesda Theater, "Statement of Significance," The Art Deco Society of Washington, <http://www.adsw.org/site/MD/Bethesda/WisconsinAve/7719/nomination/sec8.html> (accessed October 4, 2011).
25. Patrick Pascal, *Kesling Modern Structures Popularizing Modern Design in Southern California 1934-1962* (Los Angeles, CA: Balcony Press, 2002), 10; quoted in Jon L. Wilson to Roxanne Tanemori, City of Santa Monica, memorandum, 6 December 2007, "Preliminary Historic Assessment: 2310 33rd Street," <http://www01.smgov.net/planning/landmark/agendas/2007/2310%2033rd%20Street%20Preliminary%20Assessment.pdf>.
26. Pearl, "Publick Playhouse," (PG: 69-28), 7:2.
27. Robert K. Headley, *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, D.C.* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999), 246.

## MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended \_\_\_\_\_

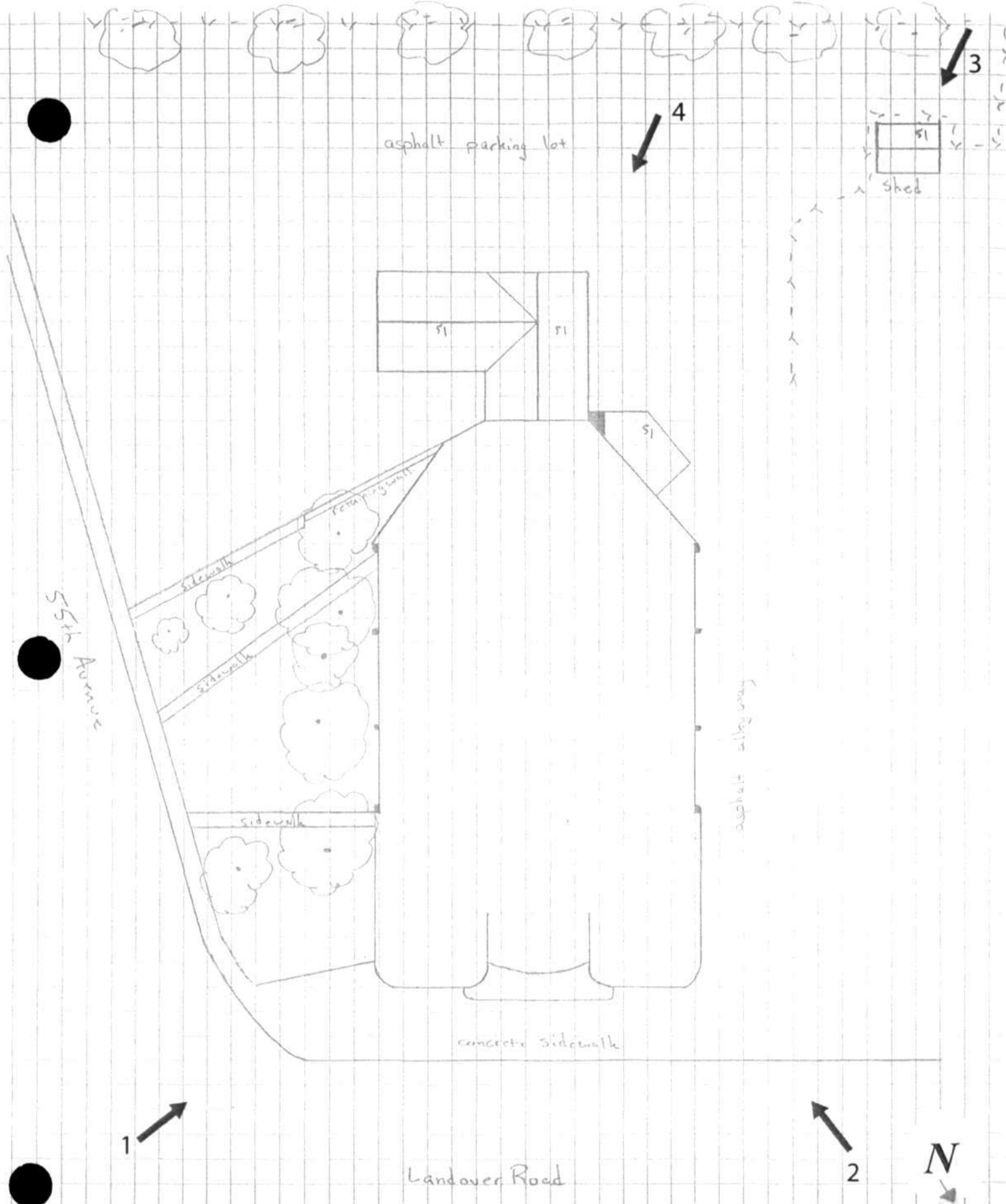
Eligibility not recommended \_\_\_\_\_

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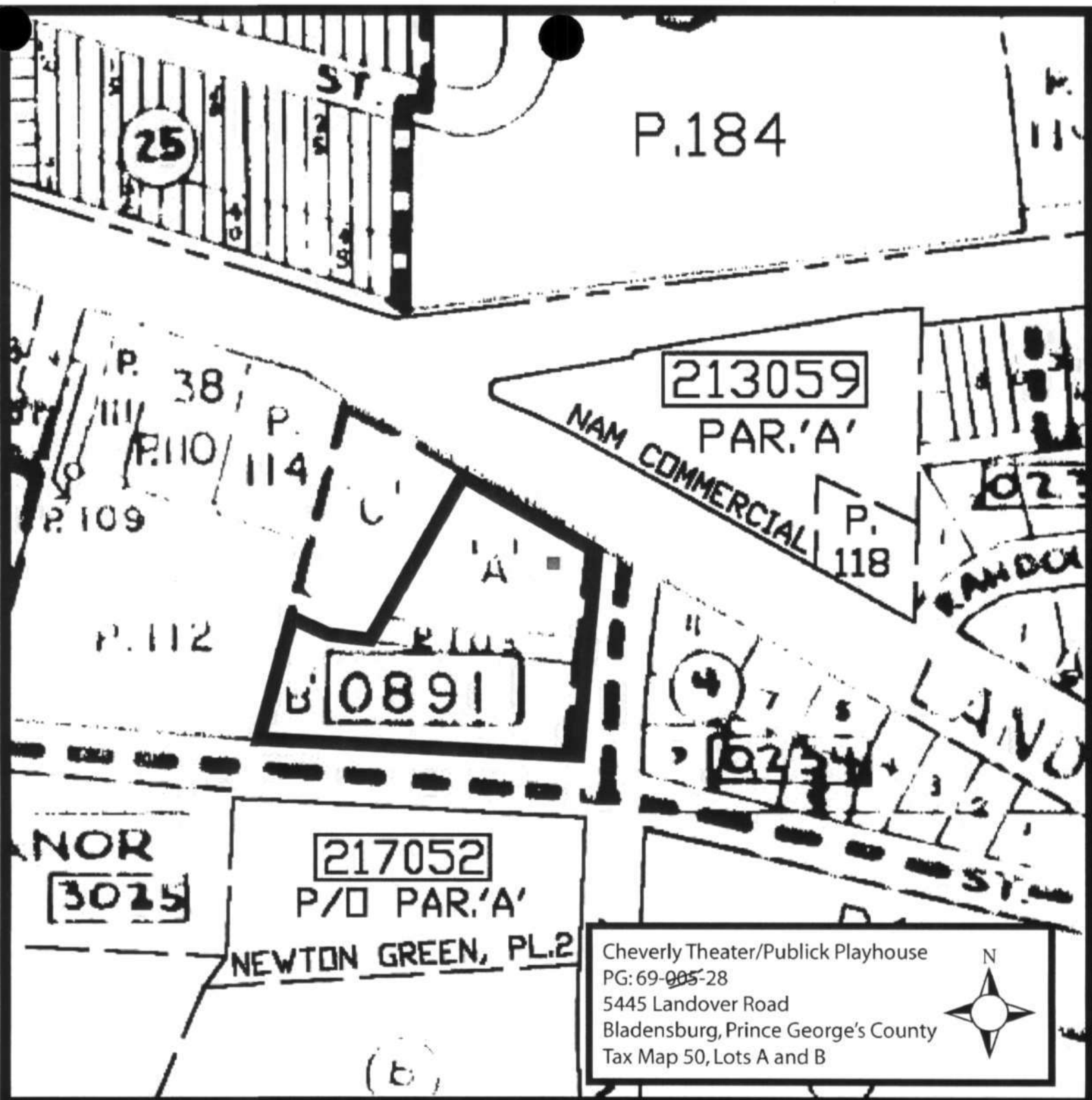




Date 9/13/2011

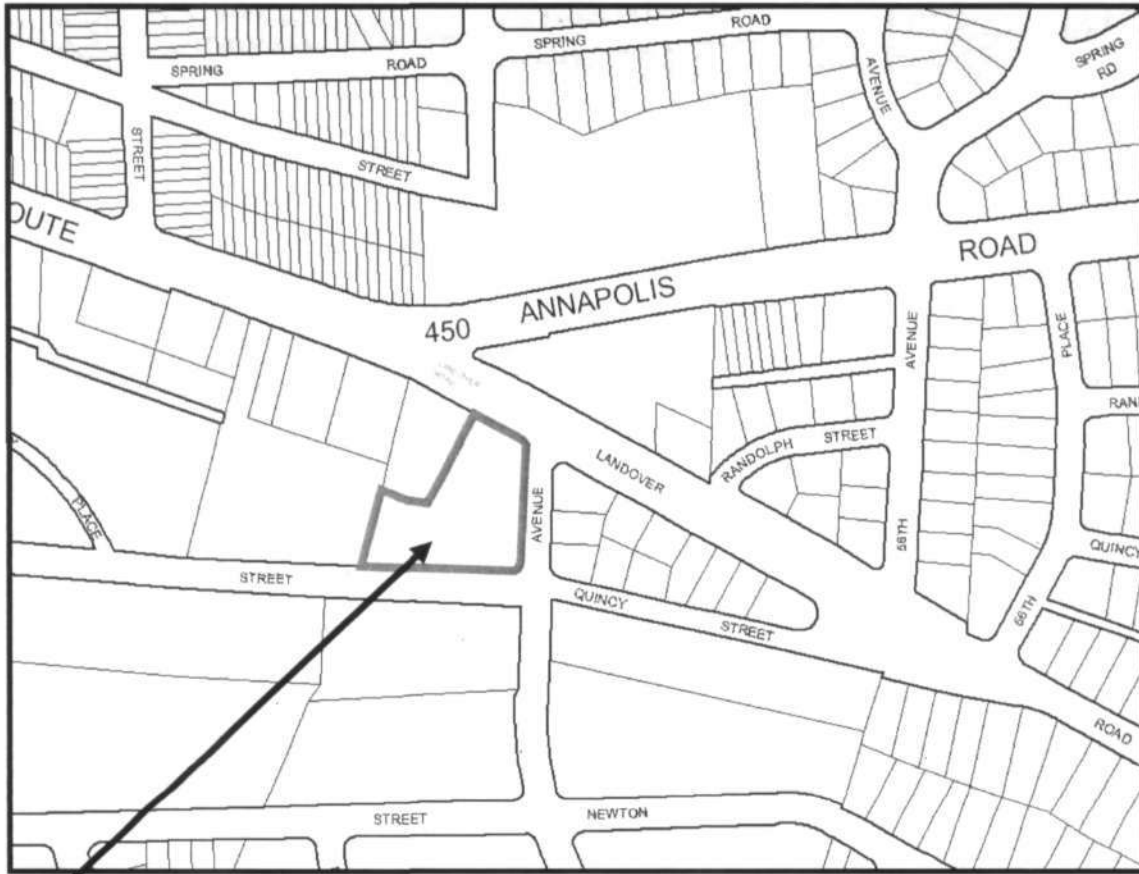
Not to Scale

I.D. # PG: 69-~~205~~ 28 Name/Address Cheverly Theatre / Public Playhouse 5445 Landover Road



Cheverly Theater/Publick Playhouse  
PG: 69-005-28  
5445 Landover Road  
Bladensburg, Prince George's County  
Tax Map 50, Lots A and B



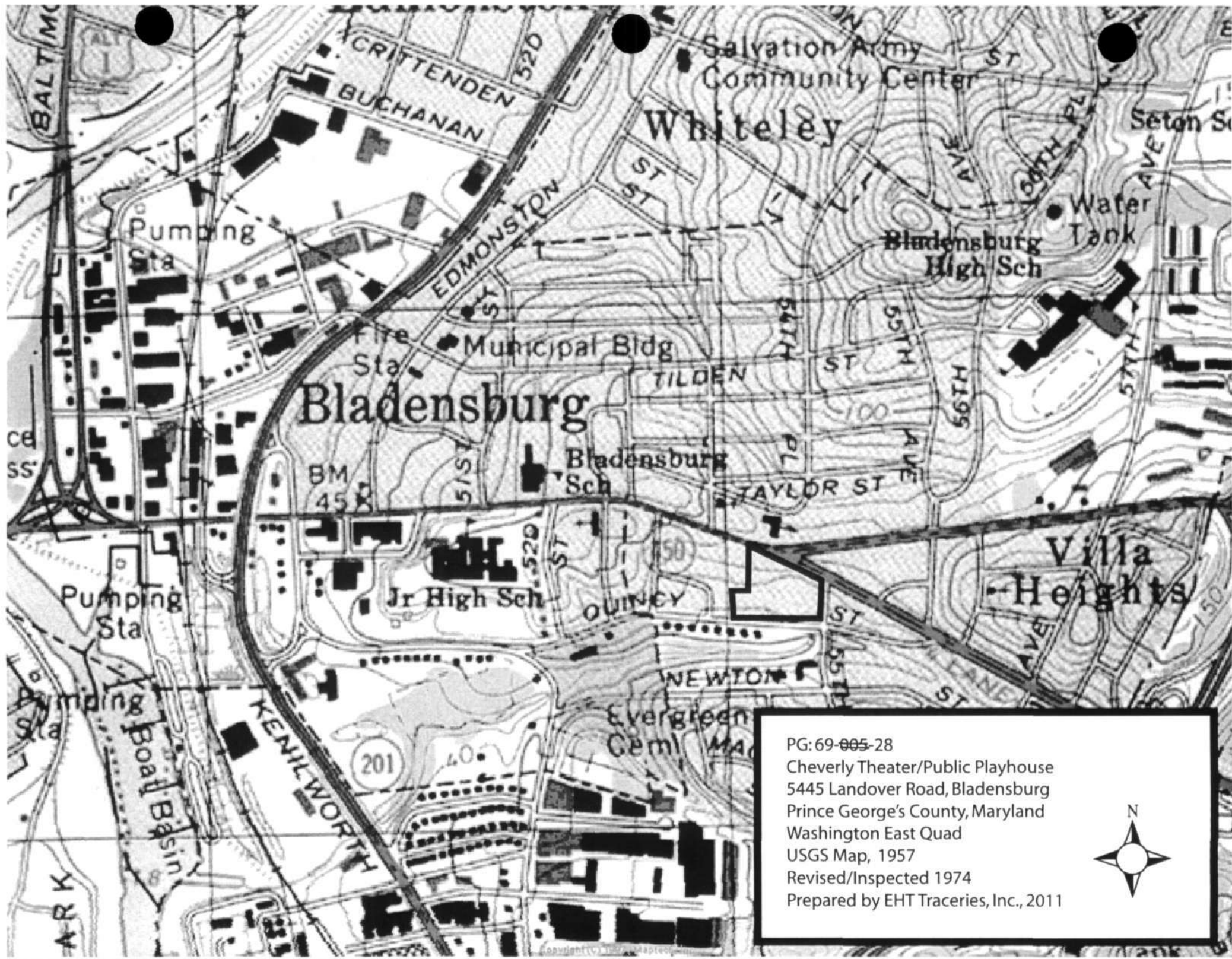


National Register Boundary

PG: 69-28  
Cheverly Theater/Publick Playhouse  
5445 Landover Road  
Bladensburg, MD

North ↑

USGS Map: Washington East



PG: 69-005-28  
Cheverly Theater/Public Playhouse  
5445 Landover Road, Bladensburg  
Prince George's County, Maryland  
Washington East Quad  
USGS Map, 1957  
Revised/Inspected 1974  
Prepared by EHT Tracerics, Inc., 2011







# RUBUCK PLAYHOUSE

CARMEN JONES	OPEN HOUSE	1810	LATIN DANCE	ANDERSON
SEPT 13, 11AM	SEPT 17	200	PARTY	SEPT 22
	1PM TO 4PM	2721000	SEPT 17 8PM	ROSA LON

P

PG169-0 2-28

Cheverly Theatre / Public Playhouse  
Prince Georges County, Maryland

ETT Traceries

September 13, 2011

MD SHPO

Theatre, facade looking southwest

#10

1 of 1

#1 of 1

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY  
HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Survey: PG#69-28 Building Date: 1947, ~~1877~~, 1984  
Building Name: Publick Playhouse  
Location: 5445 Landover Road, Bladensburg, Maryland

Public/Theater/Occupied/Excellent/Accessible

Description:

The Publick Playhouse is a large brick theater building of Art Deco design. The main block of the theater is built of red-painted brick, two stories high; the attached large rear addition is built of light-colored brick. Entrance is in the center of the north facade, through two sets of double doors, inset beneath a prominent projecting marquee. The walls flanking the entrance curve in toward the doors. Originally the curved box office window opened on the left (east) side of the curving wall; this opening has been bricked in, but its lines can be clearly seen in the brickwork of the curved easterly flanking wall. The walls of the main block are surmounted by a brick cornice, corbelled in three courses, topped by a narrow concrete upper band. Above the marquee, the higher central part of the wall is decorated with three wide vertical panels, each composed of nine vertical courses of sawtooth brick corbelling. Originally the front curved walls of the theater were painted in a scalloped rainbow design of several colors. The long walls of the rear addition are unfenestrated, and are punctuated by buttresses on east and west.

Significance:

The Publick Playhouse is a brick theater building of Art Deco design. It is the only surviving theater of this type and period in Prince George's County, and although altered from its original appearance, is a visible landmark at the intersection of two important roads into Bladensburg. This building was constructed and opened in 1947 as the Cheverly Movie Theater. For many years, the old "Cheverly" was a neighborhood institution, one of the finest of the Sidney Lust chain of movie houses, with ornate sky scenes in the ceiling, plush seating for more than 900, and even air conditioning. The theater was acquired by M-NCPPC in 1975, and renovations were undertaken to convert the building into a place for live theater performances. The rear space was constructed, and the theater opened as the Prince George's Publick Playhouse in 1977. Further renovations were undertaken in 1984, and the theater now operates a full schedule of many types of performances. Although considerably altered from its original appearance, the theater is the only surviving Art Deco theater in Prince George's County, and is still a noticeable landmark in its neighborhood.

Acreage: 16,669 square feet

Publick Playhouse

PG#69-28

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Western Shore

Chronological/Development Periods:

Modern Period - AD 1930 to present

Historic Period Themes:

Social/Education/Cultural

Resource Type:

Category: Building

Historic Environment: Suburban

Historic Functions and Uses: Theater

Design Source: unknown



# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF  
HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Survey No. PG#69-28

Magi No.

DOE   yes   no

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Cheverly Movie Theater

and/or common Publick Playhouse

## 2. Location

street & number 5445 Landover Road (Maryland Route 202)    not for publication

city, town Bladensburg    vicinity of congressional district 4

state Maryland county Prince George's County

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<u>  </u> district	<u>  </u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<u>  </u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<u>  </u> agriculture <u>  </u> museum
<u>  </u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>  </u> private	<u>  </u> unoccupied	<u>  </u> commercial <u>  </u> park
<u>  </u> structure	<u>  </u> both	<u>  </u> work in progress	<u>  </u> educational <u>  </u> private residence
<u>  </u> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<u>  </u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <u>  </u> religious
<u>  </u> object	<u>  </u> in process	<u>  </u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<u>  </u> government <u>  </u> scientific
	<u>  </u> being considered	<u>  </u> yes: unrestricted	<u>  </u> industrial <u>  </u> transportation
	<u>  </u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<u>  </u> no	<u>  </u> military <u>  </u> other:

## 4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name M-NCPPC

street & number 6600 Kenilworth Ave telephone no.:

city, town Riverdale state and zip code MD 20737

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Prince George's County Court House liber 456

street & number 14735 Main Street folio 3

city, town Upper Marlboro state MD

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title None

date    federal    state    county    local

pository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

Survey No. PG#69-28

Condition  
☒ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

Check one  
☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

Check one  
☒ original site  
☐ moved      date of move \_\_\_\_\_

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Publick Playhouse is a large brick theater building of Art Deco design. It is distinguished by its curved and corbelled entrance facade, and period marquee. It stands at the intersection of two roads just east of the Town of Bladensburg.

The main block of the theater is built of red-painted brick, two stories high; the attached large rear addition is built of light-colored brick. The original theater faces roughly north. Entrance is in the center of this north facade, through two sets of double doors, inset beneath a prominent projecting marquee. The walls flanking the entrance curve in toward the doors. Originally the curved box office window opened on the left (east) side of the curving wall; the box office window opening has been bricked in, but its lines can be clearly seen in the brickwork of the curved easterly flanking wall.

The flanking walls of the main block are surmounted by a brick cornice, corbelled in three courses, topped by a narrow concrete upper band. Above the marquee, the center part of the brick wall rises higher than the two flanking curved sections. This center section is decorated with three wide vertical panels: each panel is composed of nine vertical courses of sawtooth brick corbelling. This section, like the flanking curved walls, is surmounted by three courses of brick corbelling, topped by a narrow concrete band.

At the curved outer corners, at second story level, are two-part curved strip windows of glass brick. That on the east corner lights the ladies' lounge from above; on the west, the strip window lights the office space. Originally the front of the curved walls of the theater were painted in a very prominent scalloped rainbow design of several colors.

When the theater was first built in 1947, huge letters spelling out **CHEVERLY** dominated the top of the central section. They have been replaced with letters which spell out the new name of the theater - **PUBLICK PLAYHOUSE**.

The long walls of the rear addition are unfenestrated, and are punctuated by buttresses on east and west.

## 8. Significance

Survey No. PG#69-28

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1947, 1974, 1984

Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D  
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Publick Playhouse is brick theater building of Art Deco design. It is the only surviving theater of this type and period in Prince George's County, and although altered from its original appearance, is a visible landmark at the intersection of two important roads into Bladensburg.

This building was constructed and opened in 1947 as the Cheverly Movie Theater. It was located just a short distance west of the community of Cheverly, which had been developed during the early 1920s by real estate developer Robert Marshall. Cheverly was incorporated in 1931, and grew slowly during the Depression and the Second World War. In the prosperous period following the war, approximately 1/2 acre on the Bladensburg road was purchased, and the highly decorative Art Deco theater opened as the Cheverly Movie Theater.<sup>1</sup>

For many years, the old "Cheverly" was a neighborhood institution, one of the finest of the Sidney Lust chain of movie houses. The neighborhood flocked to see first-run films in a movie house distinguished by Art Deco designs, with ornate sky scenes in the ceiling, plush seating for more than 900, and even air conditioning.<sup>2</sup>

By the late 1960s, the theater was no longer in steady use. For several years it stood vacant, and then in 1975 was acquired by MNCPPC. At this time, renovations were undertaken

<sup>1</sup> See Cheverly Survey area, PG#69-22, P.G. Historic Preservation Section, MNCPPC, Upper Marlboro; Prince George's County Deed #1315:383.

<sup>2</sup> See Publick Playhouse brochures: "A Decade of Theatre", 1987, MNCPPC; "Playbill 1992 1993 - the Friends of the Publick Playhouse", 1992.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. PG#69-28

See Notes, Item 8

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 16669 sq ftQuadrangle name Washington EastQuadrangle scale 1:24000UTM References do NOT complete UTM referencesA 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan G. Pearl, Research/Architectural HistorianPrince George's Countyorganization Historic Preservation Commissiondate March 1993street & number 14741 Gov. Oden Bowie Drivetelephone 301-952-3521city or town Upper Marlborostate MD 20772

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
DHCP/DHCD  
100 COMMUNITY PLACE  
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2023  
514-7600



MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
STATE HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY FORM

Survey No. PG#69-28

Description (continued)

Section 7 Page 2

The interior of the main block consists of three basic spaces: box office area, lobby and auditorium. The box office area is just inside the exterior double doors. This area in turn leads into a curved lobby area and then through doors into the large sloping auditorium. In the auditorium, the walls are panelled with small green acoustical panels in geometric pattern. Drapes hang in parallel rows from each side of the auditorium. All decoration is in green and beige and salmon colors. Doors are beige with green panels, and the surrounds are painted salmon pink. In the original 1947 theater there was a low balustrade behind the last row of seats; it has been replaced by a full wall.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
STATE HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY FORM  
Statement of Significance (continued)

Survey No. PG#69-28

Section 8 Page 2

to convert the building into a place for live theater performances. The rear space was constructed, and the theater opened as the Prince George's Publick Playhouse in 1977.<sup>3</sup>

The original colorful exterior decor was retained until the renovations of 1984. At this time, the scallop decoration was painted over; the exterior box office was closed, and the box office window bricked in. On the interior, many of the lowest rows of seats in the auditorium were removed in order to make room for a large stage. Backstage space was added in the rear wing. Also the low balustrade behind the last row of seats was replaced by a full wall, creating a complete separation between auditorium and lobby.<sup>4</sup>

The Publick Playhouse now operates a full schedule of many types of performances. Although considerably altered from its original configuration and appearance, the theater still represents the only surviving Art Deco theater in Prince George's County, and is still a noticeable landmark in its neighborhood.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid, conversation with theater manager, December 1992.

<sup>4</sup> ibid.



PG:69-28

PG#69-28

Publick Playhouse

Bladensburg

Prince Georges County

Washington East



# PUBLICK PLAYHOUSE

COGNATE EYES  
DEC 11 AM

DIVINER AFRICAN DANCERS  
& DRUMMERS DEC 11 8 PM

FOR TICKETS CALL 277-1710

PGLT PRESENTS "MIRACLE ON 34TH  
STREET" DEC 10 11 8 PM

DEC 12 2&8 PM DEC 13 2&7:30 PM

PUBLICK  
PLAYHOUSE





Pg # 67-28

Public's Playhouse  
Princi Lerpe's Co. 110  
Susan L. Pearl  
December 1992  
MD SAPO  
North facade, for NW  
192



Pl # 67-28

Public's Playhouse  
Prince George's Co MD

Susan A. Paarl

December 1992

MD SHPO

pre 1984 photo, North facade

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